

*Rwanda has announced its commitment to eradicate neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) by 2030.*

The government is hopeful that with continued research and sustainable prevention programs, this ambitious goal can be achieved. NTDs, which have long plagued people in developing countries, often go unnoticed despite their serious health consequences. Now, Rwanda is taking bold steps to change that.

The announcement came as Rwanda hosts the second International Conference on Neglected Tropical Diseases (InCORNTD) in Africa under the theme: “Partnering to Eliminate NTDs.” which will run through January 24, 2025. The conference gathered over 500 experts, decision-makers, and partners from across the continent to share knowledge and strategies for eradicating these diseases.

Dr. Aimable Mbituyumuremyi, Head of the Malaria and Other Neglected Diseases Department at RBC, shared that the most common NTDs in Rwanda are intestinal worms, affecting 48% of adults and 41% of children. “These numbers are concerning,” he stated, emphasizing the need for action to address these health challenges. These diseases often lead to malnutrition and anemia, particularly in children and pregnant women.

Despite these challenges, the country is optimistic as it has already succeeded in eliminating diseases like sleeping sickness, which is caused by the Tse Tse fly.

“We’ve proven that we can eradicate NTDs, and we believe we can do the same with others,” points out Dr Mbituyumuremyi.

However, the path to full eradication is not without obstacles, many sectors are not yet fully coordinated in the fight against NTDs. Poor sanitation, lack of clean water, and inadequate health infrastructure continue to be major hurdles in tackling these diseases.

Dr. Masoka Papa Fallah, Deputy Director General of the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC), emphasized the importance of regional cooperation to eliminate NTDs. He also stressed the need for more research into treatments, as these diseases once claimed countless lives due to lack of knowledge.

Rwanda also shared its research on yaws, a disease that has affected many in the

Virunga region. With 6,000 reported cases, the country is focusing on treatment and monitoring, hoping that sharing their experience will help other African nations in their efforts to eradicate the disease.

In April 2022, the World Health Organization (WHO) confirmed that Rwanda had eliminated sleeping sickness. The country has also eradicated six other diseases, including five skin diseases and Human African Trypanosomiasis. These successes are a sign of the country's commitment to improving public health.

Rwanda's progress is a hopeful story for Africa. Health authorities across the continent are tackling the environmental factors that contribute to NTDs, such as poor sanitation and contaminated water. By improving access to clean water, better sanitation, and increasing awareness, these diseases can be prevented, saving countless lives.

Children are often the most vulnerable to NTDs, which result in millions of deaths every year. However, with continued focus and collaboration, these diseases can be eradicated, giving future generations the opportunity to grow up without these preventable illnesses.

At the global level, the World Health Organization identifies 21 NTDs, with Rwanda focusing on intestinal worms, yaws, guinea worm, tapeworm, bilharzia, snake bites, rabies, and leprosy. Through research and collaboration, Rwanda is working to eliminate these diseases and set an example for the rest of Africa.